

Transforming health care in BC: a continuum from home care to long-term care

ABOUT FEDERAL RETIREES

The National Association of Federal Retirees is the largest national advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors. Founded in Victoria, BC in 1963 and now with more than 176,000 members across Canada, and more than 26,000 members in British Columbia, we have a proud history of advocacy on behalf of our members and retirees.

The National Association of Federal Retirees advocates in the best interest of its members, voicing support for secure, healthy and dignified retirements for federal retirees and all Canadians. This work is especially relevant as the number of adults aged 65 and older in British Columbia increased from 14 per cent to 18 per cent of the population between 2008 and 2018 and now accounts for nearly a quarter of the population on Vancouver Island¹. Further, our province has seven of Canada's ten municipalities with the highest percentage of people aged 85 plus, ranging from 5.9 per cent in Creston to 9.7 per cent in Sydney, much higher than the BC average of 2.3 per cent².

Federal Retirees has identified four main priorities to bring forward while engaging with all governments, political parties and candidates.

- Retirement income security
- Veteran well-being
- Pharmacare
- National Seniors Strategy, particularly home care and long-term care

While some of these policy priorities fall mainly or only under federal jurisdiction, the National Association of Federal Retirees believes that all levels of government, from federal to municipal, have a role to play in ensuring Canada responds to the demographic changes we are witnessing.

The ability to age in place with dignity and security should not depend on your postal code. Canadians of all ages urgently need all levels of government working together on these priorities to ensure home care is available, medications are affordable, communities are accessible and retirement incomes are secure.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FEDERAL RETIREES AND THE 2020 BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Key messages

In this election, we ask the next provincial government to commit to:

- working with the federal government to develop and implement ***national standards for long-term care and home care*** across the continuum of older adult care, and ensure appropriate funding tied to meeting the standards;
- working with the federal government to develop and implement a ***national pharmacare program*** as an integral part of integrated community health care; and,



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- finding ways, particularly during the current pandemic, to ensure older adults can continue to contribute as valued partners in our communities, and to **reduce social isolation**.

The BC Seniors Advocate, a position almost unique in Canada, has been effective in identifying and helping address the policy gaps and issues most important to older adults in our province. The Seniors Advocate is essential in the implementation and stewardship of a **provincial seniors strategy** that would encompass the three pillar aforementioned. British Columbia needs a comprehensive seniors strategy that aligns with the current needs of British Columbians and that can adapt to serve the changing needs of an aging population. A comprehensive seniors strategy means an integrated set of policies that address the health, and social determinants of health, of older adults in a meaningful way, including adequate income, housing and transportation in age-friendly neighbourhoods. We ask that the new provincial government to work with the federal government to also establish a national seniors strategy. This comprehensive seniors strategy would include the above specific requests and serve the current and future needs of British Columbians, as well as to build a more equitable framework for aging in Canada.

What are the issues?

The federal government has committed to acting on elements of a seniors strategy, from national long-term care standards to pharmacare — but British Columbians need action from their provincial government too. Now is the time for British Columbia to transform health care.

Across the country, as well as in our province, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing issues with health and older adult care, resulting in devastating circumstances in long-term care homes and similar facilities, and for older adults and vulnerable populations generally. These issues cannot be ignored by governments anymore.

As we enter the next phase of the pandemic, we will need to address additional health-care concerns, including backlogs for surgical and medical procedures, mental health impacts and the social effects of restrictive measures put in place to stop the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 is an opportunity to transform our health-care system and rethink older adult care and social services for the better.

A seniors strategy is an umbrella that covers the policies that are most important to older adults, and frames those policies as a continuum. Seniors strategies target all aspects of aging within a community.

The well-being of older adults in British Columbia, now and for years to come, depends on the commitment of the provincial government to develop a comprehensive seniors strategy.

SOME CHALLENGES IN BUILDING A TRANSFORMED HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM

Continuum of care, from home to long-term care

- Ensuring an integrated continuum of care (that is, coordinated and continuous care across health-care services and settings) close to home is vital so that British Columbians can access the care they need in comfortable and familiar settings in their communities.
- Most British Columbians would like to age at home but need proper support to do so. We need a health-care system that prioritizes options to enable older adults to live in and remain connected to their communities, while ensuring access to the full continuum of care.
- There is a growing need for new and better trained health and social service providers, like home care, home support and care aides working in interdisciplinary teams to provide community care. As has been highlighted by COVID-19, adequate staffing levels, better training and education and safe working conditions are needed to improve care.
- This also means that we need to support informal caregivers who are a cornerstone of home and institutional care. Being an informal caregiver comes at a cost, with impacts to their careers and personal finances as well as their physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. Increasing home care and community alternatives to institutionalization cannot be done at



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the expense of informal caregivers. Informal caregivers need to be thought of as integral part of the health system and be supported and trained as such.

Pharmacare as an integral part of community health care

- One in five Canadians have inadequate drug coverage and one in five hospitalizations could be prevented through more appropriate use of prescription drugs.
- Access to medications in community settings on par with what is available at no cost in hospital settings must be an integral part of a national seniors strategy. The ability to fill prescriptions for safe and appropriate medications is necessary to support healthy aging, the management of health conditions and home care in communities.
- Pharmacare should be part of Canada's universal health-care framework and should aim to improve the safety and availability, as well as reduce the costs of prescription drugs for all Canadians, including British Columbians.

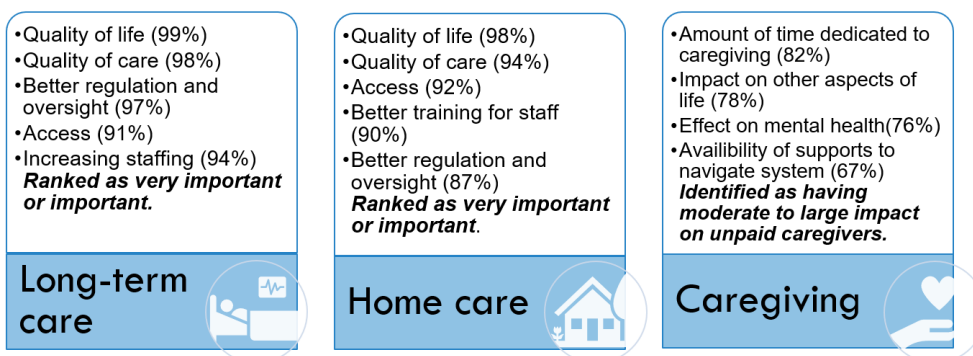
Maintaining independence, productivity and engagement in the community

- Social isolation, elder abuse, ageism and a lack of age-friendly services can worsen quality of life, and lead to poor health outcomes, higher social costs and the loss of vital economic and social contributions from older populations.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some of the huge flaws and worsening social conditions in our communities. Social isolation must be addressed to ensure older adults continue to thrive in their communities.

INSIGHTS FROM NATIONAL MEMBER SURVEY ON OLDER ADULT CARE AND COVID-19

In August 2020, Federal Retirees conducted a survey of its members to better understand their views and experiences on three key areas during the COVID-19 pandemic: long-term care, home care and caregiving.

Views of respondents with personal experience in each area



TALKING TO CANDIDATES

During British Columbia's provincial election, you may have an opportunity to engage with candidates and/or political party members and officials — keeping a safe physical distance, of course! This might include calls from candidates, door-to-door canvassing by political parties' volunteers, radio call-in shows and telephone or web-based town halls offered by campaigns or community groups.

You can also reach out to your local candidates by phone or email, or on social media.



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If you have a chance, ask your local candidates about the following issues—and send a short email to advocacyteam@federalretirees.ca to let us know how your candidates answered!

- Advocates from across the country have been calling for a comprehensive seniors strategy to address older adult care, the social determinants of health (housing, transport, income security), caregiver support and the development of age-friendly communities. But provincial governments have a role to play in addressing these issues and cannot simply wait for the federal government to take action.
 - ▶ *Does your party support a seniors strategy and will it encourage the federal government to lead its development and implementation?*
 - ▶ *What is your party's plan for a comprehensive seniors strategy in British Columbia?*
 - ▶ *Does your party support national standards and funding that is dependent upon meeting those standards for long-term and home care?*
 - ▶ *What will you or your party do to push for implementation? Will you work with the federal and other governments to implement national standards?*
 - ▶ *If not, what is your solution to the serious issues existing in long-term care?*
- Too many British Columbians must choose between paying for groceries or paying for medication, while at the same time an estimated one in five hospitalizations could be prevented through more appropriate use of prescription drugs.
 - ▶ *What is your party's position on implementation of national pharmacare that is universal, public, single-payer administered, accessible, comprehensive and portable?*
 - ▶ *What concrete steps will your party take to work with other provinces and the federal government to implement national pharmacare?*
- The COVID-19 pandemic has made social isolation worse for some British Columbians, particularly older adults. Social isolation can lead to poor health outcomes and a lower quality of life.
 - ▶ *What will your party do to increase the social connection of older British Columbians within their communities?*

1 See p.4: <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2019/12/MonitoringReport2019.pdf>

2 See P.9-10: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016004/98-200-x2016004-eng.pdf>



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